

LITERATURE.

REVIEW OF NEW BOOKS.

My RECOLLECTIONS OF LORD BYRON. By the Countess Guiccioli. Published by Harper & Brothers. Received from Turner Brothers & Co. and Claxton, Remsen & Haffelinger.

This is the work for which Byron has been preparing the public for many months. The woman who gained celebrity by a fiction with one of the great poets of the age sits down in her old age to tell the world what she thought of him; and the world, albeit Byron occupies but little of its attention at the present day, awaits with curious interest the expected opening of old and almost forgotten scandals, in the hope that some of the mysteries of the poet's life may at last be brought to light. The world will be doomed to disappointment, for Byron's inamorata tells absolutely nothing new, and her work is just such a one as such a woman might be expected to write. All, or nearly all, the facts in it are compiled from the various sources with which the public are quite as familiar as the Countess Guiccioli. The work is the crooning of a weak and vain old woman, who remembers with satisfaction rather than shame the sins of her youth, and is pervaded by a querulous spirit of fault-finding with those who have written about Byron in any other than the most beatific spirit, with his family, friends, and unhappy wife—about whom it is evident that the Countess Guiccioli knows absolutely nothing, and is not able to judge even if she did know. It is a sugar-and-water sort of vindication of Byron's life and works, which is weakest just where vindication is most needed. In spite of all this the book is one of much interest. It gives a comprehensive sketch of Byron's career, and even if it were more trashy than it is, the very natural curiosity to see what the woman who seemed to have the firmest hold upon his affections has to say about him would secure for it a multitude of readers. As a specimen of the book we quote as follows from the chapter on "The Constancy of Lord Byron":—

The constancy of heart that he showed in friendship, was it equally his in matters of love? By his energy of soul unable ever to forget anything, Lord Byron possessed the first condition towards constancy in love. Contrary to those sensible persons who say that they are unable to love, for the simple reason that they have already loved too much, it might rather be said of Lord Byron that he still loved on only because he had loved so much. His poems are his idealized fictions and constancy in love. All the heroes of his poems are faithful and constant, from Conrad, Lara, Selim, all those of the Oriental poems of his youth, up to those of his latter life, to the Biblical mysteries. Even the angels, in their high and ethereal spheres, are written shortly before his death. "Heaven forbid," he writes, "that I should be untrue to my love, I prefer suffering to inconstancy—to and to—rather than return thee without thy beloved. In—thy—renewed—kiss—presses the two amorous souls, to the celestial sphere, to abandon—

Moore then observes the extraordinary constancy Lord Byron showed in clinging to the poem, "I may say—"

The poet gives it to be understood that they will be punished; which forms the moral of the piece. Don Juan himself refuses the love of a beautiful satiana, from fidelity to the remembrance of his first love. In the next canto does yield, he seems to bear with, rather than to have sought success. One feels that this idealization of fidelity and constancy really has its source in Lord Byron's heart, and not in his imagination. The only proof that we can give of a judicious proof must be drawn from his own life.

The first condition for judging any one impartially with regard to inconstancy in love, is not only to know the facts and circumstances connected with the case, but especially to know the nature of the sentiment to which the name of love has been applied. We are aware that, at fifteen years of age, Lord Byron's heart was already under the influence of a young girl of seventeen, and that a portion of age prevents such an affection from offering any grounds on which to examine his capability of being constant. It is well known how much suffering this early passion caused him. The object of his affection was not a token of reciprocal love that was innocent, giving him her picture, agreeing to meetings, receiving all the spontaneous, innocent, confiding tenderness of his young and ardent heart, left him with the memory of the account of his youth, in order to marry a fashionable, vulgar man. And thus did she destroy the charm which governed his heart. Precocious reflection, with its accompaniment of knowledge, arising, continuing, through young souls on the road to error, succeeded to his enchantment. He then began (at sixteen) to talk of vanished illusions; and for want of something better, allowed himself to be carried away, and to live an ordinary university life. He evidently did not what others did; but he was made of different materials; and while they thought this disposition very natural, and tranquil in their infancies, he believed himself innocent, he alone discovered of his own conduct and blamed it. The better to escape all this, he went in search of forgetfulness amid the fresh breezes of ocean, across the Pyrenees, among the ruins of ancient civilization. Yet after two years' travelling, on his return to England, his soul all love, his heart burning with an insatiable ardor, through that intoxication of success which weakens, through that eagerness for the day at Ravenna, a city of mind, and even by a sort of psychological curiosity, Lord Byron fell into new attachments. And these attachments, not being of a nature that could stand the trial of reflection, caused him to give up again for a while the objects. But his soul was ever agitated, in commotion, and, even when he changed, it was through necessity rather than caprice. In order to escape once more from himself, from the attachments, from the objects, he sought the enthusiasm which his personal beauty and his genius excited among women, he resolved to take refuge in an indissoluble tie, in a formed by duty, not love. Perhaps he might have found strength for perseverance in the beauty of the sacrifice. His soul was quite capable of it. But destiny pursued him in his choice, and rendered it impossible. To his misfortune, he married Miss Milbank. Again he drifted away from the right path, but, this time, with the resolution of keeping his heart independent, his soul free and unfettered by any indissoluble tie. But in coming to this determination at the age of twenty-eight, he had not considered his own mind as fit to be carried. Vainly he sought to lull it, to keep it earthward, to laugh at its own aspirations—useless labor! One day it broke loose. Nature is like water; sooner or later it must find its equilibrium. From that day forth, his mind was carried to a height; reflection had no more power; and the love which had taken possession of his soul left him not again, but accompanied him to his last hour, through the modifications inevitable in earthly affections. This constancy, maintained throughout without a struggle, be understood at once; and felt that the unchanging sentiment belonged equally to his will and to his destiny.

"Colum, non animam insulans, qui trans mare currit," wrote an ancient poet at Ravenna, on the opening page of "Jacopo Ortis." Foscolo's work, that had just fallen into his hands; for he knew that no one could read this avowal of his heart where he had traced it. After having remarked the strange coincidence by which his volume was brought to his hand before him, just when he was about to be carried to the other side, he continued thus:—

"Most men bewail not having attained the object of their desires. I have often to deplore the obtaining mine, for I can not love moderately, nor quiet my heart with moderate fruition. The letters of this Italian Werther are very interesting; at least I think so, but my present feelings hardly render me a competent judge."

Another time, a volume of "Corinne," translated into Italian, fell under his notice at Ravenna. In the same language, which no one then about him could read, he condescended to this book the secret of his heart, and, with a noble impetuosity, poured out its contents in words of noble melody. He concluded thus:—"Think of me when Alps and sea shall separate us; but that will never come to pass, unless you will it."

It was not without a certain amount of preparation that he was so enraptured in the multiplicity of complications, and honor spoke so loudly, that both sides were forced to will it. When the Countess Guiccioli departed the result of inconstancy, is incapable to form an estimate of his great soul. His affection, that had lasted for years, admitted no longer of any unreasoning, for it was brought into complete conformity with the laws of nature. The heart underwent the transformation produced by time. His affection was gradually acquiring the sweetness of unchanging friendship, without losing the charm appearing to cold passion. The secret of his constancy, this sadness betray the extent of this sublime sacrifice! And then, when once arrived in Greece, already determined to brave all the storms gathering above his head, he wrote unobscuredly to Moore, in a letter which, in its simplicity which not only forbade any exaggeration of sentiment, but even made him restrain expression; which was also rendered imperative by the circumstances then surrounding him.

"I shall have seen the object of my mission from the committee, and then I return to Italy. Pray be as cheerful and tranquil as you can, and be assured that there is nothing here that can excite anything but the wish to be with you again, though we are very kindly treated by the English here of all descriptions."

"September 11.—You may be sure that the moment I can join you again will be as welcome to me as any period of acquiescence. There is nothing so very attractive here to occupy my attention; but both honor and inclination demand that I should serve the Greek cause. I wish that this cause, as well as the affairs of Spain, were favorably settled, that I might return to Italy and relate all my adventures to you."

Thus much for his constancy when he truly loved. It would be worth inquiry how many men and how many writers have carried their ideal of constancy to a higher degree than Lord Byron. My opinion is that if, in the same circumstances given, the number went a little beyond one, we might consider the result very satisfactory.

After having seen that Lord Byron was unchangeable in great principles and ideas, as soon as his mind was convinced, and that he was constant to all the true sentiments of his heart, it still remains to be shown whether he was equally so in his private life. It may be said of most men that they have no character, because they often vary in taste, and without even perceiving it. That could not be asserted of Lord Byron, although sometimes, according to his peculiar custom, he declared himself to be inconstant.

The truth is that he was, on the contrary, remarkably steadfast in his tastes. The nature of his preferences, and the conclusions to be drawn from them, were the subject of another chapter. We shall only speak of them here as relating to constancy. "We shall often have occasion," says Moore, "to remark the fidelity to early habits and tastes which distinguished Lord Byron. Moore then observes the extraordinary constancy Lord Byron showed in clinging to the poem, "I may say—"

"Foscolo's of what I truly love," said he, in the very first moment which he seized on self justice, "does not cloy me." He loved the mountains of Greece, because they recalled those of Scotland; he would have loved other mountains because they recalled those of Greece. A few months before his death he said, in his charming poem "The Island"—

"Lo! how I roam'd through lands which are not mine, Adonis loved the Apeian, I loved Parnassus, and obeyed the steep Jove's Ida and Olympus crown the deep; but I was not in my thrilling thrall; Their nature held me in their thrilling thrall; The infant rapids still survived the boy; My Celtic memories with the Phrygian mount, And the mountains of the Caucasus, my faint, forgive me, Homer's universal strain; Forgive me, Phobos! that my fancy stray'd; To the north and nature from those beloved before; Your scenes submit, from those beloved before."

He would have a place of abode where he had loved when in it. The same with regard to a dwelling, a walk, a melody, a perfume, a form, and even a dish, which he cared so little for any sort of food. His English impressions, his readings at that age, had a great deal to do with his choice of poetic subjects afterwards; and we find them again reproduced even in his last dramatic work. "Werner," written in such a manner as to be the result of the "Gauterby Tale" read in childhood. Never was a man more constant in his habits and tastes than he; and, indeed, it required that indefinable charm of soul he possessed, and which pervaded his whole being, to prevent monotony from perverting this quality into a fault.

Why, then, have his biographers talked so much of his mobility, if it were not to make his life more interesting? It is not to be wondered at that the poet to the veracity of his genius (one of his great gifts, and which ever belongs to him) they have added mobility of character, such as often—too often, perhaps—influenced his composition and tinged his external actions with a certain passion, but he done so without examining his actions, without reflecting that this mobility vanished as it was written, or in the light play of his witty conversation, but that to the veracity of his genius (one of his great gifts, and which ever belongs to him) they have added mobility of character, such as often—too often, perhaps—influenced his composition and tinged his external actions with a certain passion, but he done so without examining his actions, without reflecting that this mobility vanished as it was written, or in the light play of his witty conversation, but that to the veracity of his genius (one of his great gifts, and which ever belongs to him) they have added mobility of character, such as 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